

# Polish walker earns fourth Olympic gold

Posted: Friday August 27, 2004 1:40PM; Updated: Friday August 27, 2004 1:40PM

ATHENS, Greece (AP) -- Robert Korzeniowski of Poland added to his record collection of gold medals in race walking with his unprecedented third consecutive Olympic victory Friday in the 50-kilometer walk.

It was a final triumph for the 36-year-old Pole, who says he is retiring after the Olympics.

With the Polish flag clenched between his teeth, Korzeniowski crossed the finish line in the virtually empty Olympic Stadium Friday morning in 3 hours, 38 minutes and 46 seconds -- more than four minutes ahead of silver medalist Denis Nizhegorodov.

Nizhegorodov, moving slowly and appearing disoriented over the final few hundred meters, finished in 3:42.50, then lay face-down on the track in exhaustion.

Another Russian, Aleksey Voyevodin, overtook Yu Caohong of China just outside the stadium to claim the bronze in 3:43.34.

In all, Korzeniowski, has won four Olympic golds -- the last three in the 50-kilometer walk and the 20-kilometer event in Sydney four years ago, a race he won after Bernard Saguaro of Mexico was disqualified. No other walker has won more than one gold medal.

Nizhegorodov, who was fifth at last year's world championships, stayed with Korzeniowski through most of the race and was just 30 seconds behind the leader with 15 kilometers to go. The pace proved too much for the Russian, who barely managed to make it the rest of the way.

Head down, weaving from side to side of the course, he glanced behind him as he entered the stadium, then seeing no one close, struggled to the finish line.

Korzeniowski, who has lived and trained in France since 1992, looked as if he was ready for another 50 kilometers. Someone gave him his country's flag as he entered the stadium. First he waved it with one hand, then grabbed it with his teeth so he could keep his walking form across the line.

He and Voyevodin hugged, then Korzeniowski ran around the track in a victory lap.

The event -- the longest in track and field -- began at 7 a.m., local time to avoid the intense afternoon heat.